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Driven by water: Courtyard landscapes at The Waltham Watch Factory

June 20, 2013 - Spotlights

With responsible stormwater management as a guiding design theme, Richard Burck Associates made the movement of rainwater - from roof to downspout to runnel to rain garden - something both intelligible and elegant for this historic landscape. The Waltham Watch Factory, once a world-renowned manufacturer of watches, clocks, and other timepieces, lies on the bank of the Charles River, thirteen miles upstream from downtown Boston. The 12-acre property, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, features 22 interconnected brick buildings that total 400,000 s/f of interior space.

Designing the site's historic courtyard spaces was a significant part of the landscape renovation, but only one aspect of a broader stormwater mitigation strategy that was implemented throughout the entire site. The design team adopted existing industrial language from the 150-year-old factory landscape and applied modern stormwater practices to mitigate rainwater that collects on roof, parking, and hardscape surfaces. Downspouts, open and bridged runnels, rain gardens, and crushed-stone infiltration trenches collect, transport, and hold stormwater for on-site infiltration. Where rain gardens were installed over capped, pre-existing contaminated soils, a rubber pond liner and outlet pipe ensures that river-bound stormwater will not mobilize industrial contaminants.

In two of the courtyards that are fully enclosed by buildings, steel basins spout harvested rainwater from single jets, introducing gentle sounds that reverberate off of the exterior factory walls. An herbaceous layer of perennials, including wood fern, cranesbill, and foamflower, creates a lush composition in the courtyards' planting beds, and swaths of Pennsylvania sedge help to absorb and clean stormwater runoff in the rain gardens.

Project Team:

Landscape Architect: Richard Burck Associates, Inc.

Architect: Bruner/Cott & Associates, Inc.

Civil Engineer: BSC Group

Permitting Coordinator: Charles River Watershed Association

Geotechnical Engineer: Haley and Aldrich Inc.

Environmental & Soil Consultant: Pine & Swallow Environmental

Site Contractor: DRL Corporation

Construction Manager: Columbia Construction Company

Landscape Contractor: Landscaping Etc., Inc.

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